

Venezuela Gradually Reopens Border with Colombia for Pedestrians



Caracas, December 20 (RHC)-- Venezuelan Defense Minister Vladimir Padrino said his country's border with Colombia has opened on Tuesday to allow for pedestrian crossing.

"After talks between Presidents Nicolas Maduro and Juan Manuel Santos, it was agreed that the border should be gradually reopened," Padrino wrote on Twitter.

The top military official added he has already started talks with his Colombian counterpart Luis Carlos Villegas in order to launch a coordinated operation in order to tackle what the Venezuelan government has called "mafias."

The border has for years been a hotbed for smuggling everything from price-controlled toothpaste and pasta to illegal drugs and weapons. The Venezuelan government says smugglers take advantage of price controls and subsidized exchange rates, taking goods out of Venezuela to sell for higher profits elsewhere, contributing to shortages in the country.

Venezuelans also cross into Colombia to purchase of food, medicine and other supplies affected by shortages in the country.

Recently, currency smuggling and hoarding has become a major concern in the border region. President Nicolas Maduro announced last week that he was closing his country's border with Colombia to combat what he slammed as "financial mafias" accused of moving Venezuelan money into Colombia.

Maduro recuperated 4 billion bolivares from these criminal groups who have been accumulating 100 bolivar bills as part of a campaign of economic war against the country. In the face of inflation, the 100 bolivar bill — the largest denomination bill — has been subject to speculation and hoarding.

The Venezuelan president decided to pull the 100 bolivar bill from circulation before new larger bills were available. The 100 bolivar bills can now be used until January 2nd.

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